



# Variables That Affect Parents' Goals for Visiting a Children's Museum

Isabella Livingston

Human Development and Family Studies Department

Mentor: Jill Trumbell, PhD



## Introduction

- Children's museums are enriching and interactive informal educational environments that foster creativity, support sensory exploration, and provide places for both free play and learning (Gong et al., 2020).
- In supporting children's play and exploration, museums provide opportunities for children to play both independently and socially with peers and parents.
- Research shows that parents understand the benefits of museums and perceive children's museums as a unique place for learning (Luke et al., 2019).
- However, little research has been done assessing what goals parents have for their children while at a children's museum and whether this relates to how they engage with their children in the museum exhibits.
- Further, extant literature suggests that outside of the museum context, parenting is impacted by numerous factors including both parental (e.g. sensitive parenting behavior, gender [Lindsey et al., 2010]) and child characteristics (e.g., gender; Turner & Gervai, 1995). Less is known about whether these factors also impact the goals parents set for their children in visiting informal learning spaces.

### Research Questions:

- What are parents' goals for their children when they visit a children's museum?
- Do parental goals differ based on characteristics known to play a role in how parents and children interact together?

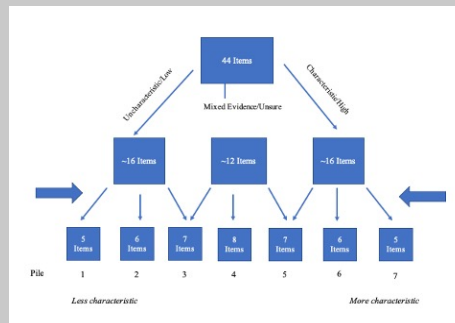
## Methods

### Participants

- 70 child-parent dyads participated
- Parents (64 mothers):  $M = 36.66$  yrs; 97.14% non-Hispanic Caucasian; 81% held at least a bachelor's degree
- Children (39 girls):  $M = 56.24$  mos

### Procedure and Measures

- Project Advancing Children's Museum Engagement took place at the Children's Museum of New Hampshire
- Parents completed a demographic questionnaire, the Child Behavior Questionnaire-Very Short Form (Putnam & Rothbart, 2006) to assess temperament, and responded to this prompt: "When you come to the Children's Museum, what do you hope your child will get out of the experience?" A constant comparative method was used to identify themes. Themes were not mutually exclusive.
- Dyads were then recorded interacting in 2 different museum exhibits that were coded for parental sensitivity. Sensitivity was coded by a pair of coders using a 44-item modification of the Caregiving Behaviors for Preschoolers Q-Set (CBPQS; Posada et al., 2018); higher scores indicate greater sensitivity. Sensitivity scores were averaged across the two exhibits.



The Q-sort procedure

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

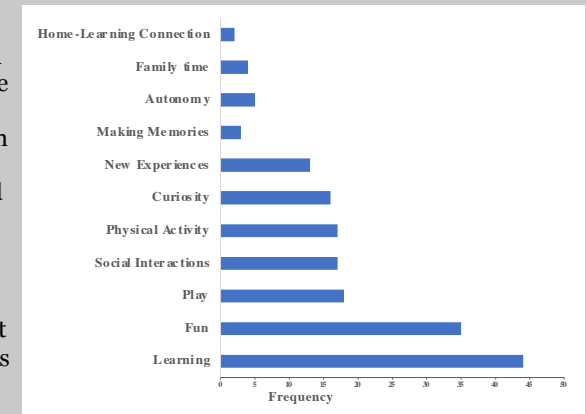
- Parental sensitivity ranged from .44 – .86 with a mean of .75 ( $SD = .09$ )
- Surgency, negative affect, and effortful control (temperament dimensions) had means of 4.71 ( $SD = .91$ ), 4.06 ( $SD = .95$ ), and 5.34 ( $SD = .64$ )

### Research Question 1

- 11 themes emerged. Within the theme of learning, there were 3 subthemes (from exhibits, hands-on, through play). Within the theme of play, 2 subthemes emerged (free play, pretend play).

### Research Question 2

- Correlation analyses revealed several significant predictors of parental goals for their children when visiting the museum.
  - The "home-learning connection" was more frequently discussed as a goal for fathers,  $r = -.25, p = .03$ .
  - More sensitive parents were more likely to discuss "learning through play,"  $r = .26, p = .04$ , and less likely to discuss "physical activity,"  $r = -.23, p = .07$ .
  - Parents of girls were more likely to discuss "new experiences" as a museum goal,  $r = -.20, p = .09$ .
  - Parents of older children were more likely to include "learning through play" ( $r = .21, p = .08$ ), "making memories" ( $r = .33, p = .006$ ), and less likely to mention "social interaction" ( $r = -.32, p = .007$ ).
  - Parents of children with higher levels of negative affect were likely to discuss "curiosity" as a museum goal,  $r = .25, p = .04$ .
  - Parents of children with high levels of surgency were less likely to discuss "new experiences/activities" ( $r = -.23, p = .05$ ) or "making memories" ( $r = -.30, p = .01$ ).



## Discussion

- Parents have diverse goals for their children at a children's museum, but most focus on learning and fun.
- Interestingly, parental goals varied as a function of parent and child characteristics.